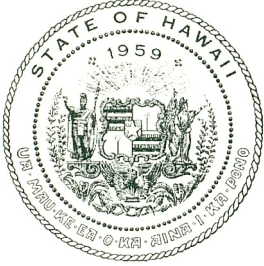


HAWAII
STATE
COMMISSION
ON THE
STATUS
OF
WOMEN



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March 30, 2017

LATE

Testimony in Support of HB 930, SD1, Relating to Education

To: Senator Jill Tokuda, Chair
Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Vice Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Senator Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Chair
Senator Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor

From: Cathy Betts, Executive Director
Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 930, SD1, Relating to Education

The Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women is in support of HB 930, SD1, which would establish an "Erin's Law" Task force to help guide and direct the implementation of a sexual abuse prevention curriculum within our Department of Education.

Sexual abuse is a difficult subject for many people to talk about. Our educators are not immune to this difficulty. Predators of children bank on others' resistance to talking about sexual abuse. Silence about the subject allows predators to continue—when we don't know the warning signs, when our children are scared or threatened into thinking mistreatment is acceptable, when we do not raise awareness about this issue—abusers continue.

Sexual abuse prevention and education is crucial for educators and students to have. While some sexual abuse prevention education is offered to our DOE, implementation is not consistent system wide and resources for the provision of training and education are limited. Yet, children are largely at risk for sexual abuse and remain at high risk of being abused by a family friend or family member.

As a result, public school students may not receive regular, consistent sexual abuse prevention education. Parents and guardians may not receive information about child sexual abuse topics; and educators and school staff may not receive sufficient training on talking to students about child sexual abuse prevention, the effects of sexual abuse on children, handling disclosures and mandatory reports to child welfare.

An Erin's law task force would work with educators and community stakeholders to develop and implement the best practices and curricula, resulting in safer students. The Commission encourages the task force to have diverse representation from organizations experienced in sexual violence prevention and education. The Commission strongly supports HB 930, SD1, and respectfully requests that this Committee pass this bill.



LATE

TO: Chairs Keith-Agaran and Tokuda, Vice Chairs Rhoads and Dela Cruz and the Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor and Senate Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Ryan Kusumoto, President & CEO of Parents And Children Together (PACT)

DATE/LOCATION: Thursday, March 30, 2017; 9:50 a.m., Conference Room 211

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 930 SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

We support of HB 930 SD1 – Relating to Education. Sadly, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will be the victim of child sexual abuse by their 18th birthday. There are more than 42 million survivors of child sexual abuse in the United States. This is a matter that is often kept silent and as a result if left unaddressed (most people do not even realize that this is a significant issue or that they are a victim). In almost every case, the only witnesses to this crime are the perpetrator and the victim. Perpetrators often tell the child this is a secret and no one will believe them. Children rarely report abuse and are meant to feel that the abuse was their fault. Most victims never tell anyone until several years after the abuse, if they ever tell at all.

We feel that implementing age appropriate and child sexual abuse training immediately is the appropriate course. We appreciate the effort in establishing a task force to “get it right”. Task forces have been formed in other states related to Erin’s Law, however, we worry about the delay in the process of ensuring that children are safe from harm. Each second we delay, a child is forever hurt and traumatized. We cannot do this to our keiki. We understand that we want to “get it right” and make sure we set this up properly. If that is the intent, so be it, however, the longer we delay, the more likely children will be at risk without needed supports. If we do not take strong measures to address the matters that impact child sexual abuse, this issue will continue to impact our community and will only negatively impact Hawai`i’s future, people, keiki, communities, culture, economy, reputation, commerce, and industries. Let’s put protection in place against those who take advantage of the most vulnerable, as they are the culprits and drivers of this criminal enterprise. This is cutting into the fabric of the Aloha State and is not acceptable here in Hawai`i.

The children who endure this traumatic sexual abuse have a long list of adverse issues. These issues include:

- Poor academic performance
- Dropping out of high school
- Self mutilation
- Persistent post traumatic stress disorder
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Increased risk for abuse in subsequent relationships
- Difficulty in forming meaningful and trusting relationships
- Cognitive deficits
- Depression
- Dissociative symptoms
- Suicide

It is critical to identify these child victims early so that support can be put in place to significantly reduce the likelihood of the long-term adverse issues and costs of the above listed items.

We support Erin's Law because it recommends:

- Child sexual abuse prevention education should be taught in grades as early as pre-Kindergarten through high school.
- Giving children the tools to speak up and seek help.
- Providing intentional and age-appropriate programming in schools regarding child sexual abuse.
- Training school staff and faculty regarding child sexual abuse prevention and the handling of sexual abuse disclosures.

Erin's Law leverages the relationship between schools and the child. Schools are primary connections to our communities that also share strong relationships with our parents and keiki. It would only be natural that we take advantage of those trusting relationships to provide the services they need and further benefit from. The teachers who spend time with the students on a daily basis should be able to recognize signs of unhealthy influence and link resources to their families. **Students may also feel more comfortable talking with a trusted teacher than their own caring parents due to the complicated circumstances that could exist.** School personnel should no longer wonder out of suspicion or feel hopeless in attempts to help students in need. We strongly believe our time should be invested in direct action in order to provide students with the services they need, before they are further affected by the negative impacts of sexual abuse. 26 States have passed Erin's Law, 17 states have introduced it, and 7 are still in process. Let's move to pass this law. We support the intent of this bill but would like to see Erin's Law implemented immediately.

Founded in 1968, Parents And Children Together (PACT) is one of Hawaii's not-for-profit organizations providing a wide array of innovative and educational social services to families in need. Assisting more than 18,000 people across the state annually, PACT helps families identify, address and successfully resolve challenges through its 16 programs. Among its services are: early education programs, domestic violence prevention and intervention programs, child abuse prevention and intervention programs, child and adolescent behavioral health programs, and community building programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **support of HB 930 SD1**, please contact me at (808) 847-3285 or rkusumoto@pacthawaii.org if you have any questions.